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TAGS: [ASEC](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [OFDP](#) [CG](#)
SUBJECT: South African Diplomat Shot

CLASSIFIED BY: Willaim J. Garvelink, Ambassador, STATE, Embassy
Kinshasa; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

11. (C) Summary: Elements of the Republican Guard shot South African diplomat Maryse Ash early morning December 4, as she departed the GDRC Presidential Compound. She sustained direct and indirect wounds from small-arms fire. Ash was stabilized first in a Kinshasa hospital, then evacuated on December 6 for further medical treatment in South Africa. While the assault brought short-term tension to the SA-DRC bilateral relationship, the attack in the heart of the peaceful diplomatic quarter reinforces the need for vigilance on the part of USG personnel in Kinshasa. End summary.

12. (C) How could this happen? In her account to South African officials, Ash contested GDRC reports that she drove through a checkpoint barrier. Some sources suggest she was driving under the influence of alcohol and inadvertently approached too close to a Republican Guard roadblock. Realizing where she was, she quickly hit the brakes and shifted gears into reverse possibly waking or startling guards at the roadblock who immediately opened fire. Another plausible scenario suggested by other analysts is the guards took the opportunity of Ash's miscue to protest salary arrears in an incident which immediately grabbed the attention of the GDRC and expatriate community (Note: The incident was not covered in Congolese press but was covered in South African media. End note). Ms. Ash, who has a right-hand drive vehicle, said she believes she would have been killed had she been driving a left-hand drive vehicle based on the location of bullet impacts on her car (Note: DRC is a left-hand drive country. End note). The government of the Republic of South Africa reportedly expressed their views in the strongest terms to the GDRC. Boniswa Ramalebana, First Secretary at the South African Embassy in Kinshasa, told us it was necessary for the South Africans to strongly protest the attack, lest "the DRC think they can attack any diplomats with impunity."

13. (C) Injuries: Ash, a political officer in her late 20s and one week from departing for her next assignment, sustained serious facial wounds from broken glass and shattered debris from her vehicle, which sustained heavy damage from multiple bullets. In addition to those indirect injuries, a bullet grazed her face. After returning to South Africa, she underwent plastic surgery to repair facial injuries on December 7. Doctors indicated that, although her injuries were not life threatening, she will suffer permanent scarring.

14. (C) Comment: Damage to the SA-DRC bilateral relationship is apparently short-lived, but the break in discipline by the DRC's elite Republican Guard was surprising. The incident itself

underscores a potential danger to expatriates traveling in Kinshasa's Gombe district. Although it is generally crime-free, the presence of armed Republican Guard elements at selected locations around GDRC facilities and the lack of clear rules of engagement can make movement in the area hazardous. Considering that Ms. Ash was attacked while likely in a vehicle with diplomatic plates -- which are easily distinguishable from regular plates -- reveals either a troubling lack of attention to detail or blatant disregard for diplomatic status on the part of GDRC security forces. The U.S. Embassy has advised its employees to remain vigilant and cautious when traveling in the vicinity of GDRC facilities, particularly at night. End comment.

GARVELINK